



SAN JOSE - ITINERARY B

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

Tuesday to Tuesday (every 14 days)



Lovers of beautiful landscapes can admire 3 of 4 famous Galapagos landmarks: the panoramic view of Bartolomé, the offshore sculpture of Kicker Rock and the blowhole of Española (only the arch of Darwin in the far north is not visited).

Moreover this route combines three of the most spectacular snorkelling sites of the Galapagos: Kicker Rock (Leon Dormido), Champion Islet and Bartolomé, where you might encounter fishing Galapagos penguins. Besides that this route also offers plenty of possibilities for optional scuba diving.

Hundreds of thousands of seabirds perch and nest on the cliffs around the flooded crater of Genovesa. Walk a very short distance through the largest insular colonies of Nazca and red-footed boobies, whilst they are courtshipping, mating, breeding, nurturing or learning to fly (depending on the

season). Southeastern Española is the only option for those eager to admire synchronous courtship dances of the only tropical albatross in the world.

The almost extinguished volcano islands in the south-east are geologically the eldest, where evolution has had enough time to create numerous endemic species. En route you can also observe emblematic marine iguanas and Galapagos penguins. Striking coral sand beaches at azure bays are favourite places for large colonies of Galapagos sea lions. Not to be missed highlights of this cruise will certainly be the extraordinary Santa Fe and South Plaza, where characteristic Galapagos land iguanas crawl below bizarre giant prickly pear cacti.

Important notes:

- The itinerary is subject to change in case of force majeure caused by exceptional and natural circumstances.
- Approximate departure and navigation times are just indicative and depend on the sea state and decisions of the captain.
- Although the Galapagos seldom require quests for wildlife, observation of specific species can never be guaranteed.

Day 1 – Tuesday

Mosquera is a pleasant start of your Galapagos visit, without having to navigate a long stretch to get first contact with the unique insular nature. This islet stands out due to having the largest concentration of **Galapagos sea lions**. Moreover it's one of the few spots inside the National Park where you can stroll around freely.

Programme:

AM: This morning you will fly from Quito or Guayaquil to Baltra Airport.

PM: After become welcomed aboard M/Y San Jose, check-in, lunch buffet and the safety-drill you will visit Mosquera for a leisurely beach stroll and snorkelling.

Navigation: Shortly before midnight we will lift the anchor and sail about 6 hrs – depending on sea conditions – northeast to Genovesa.

AM: Arrival at Baltra Airport

At Baltra Airport you have to pay your Galapagos National Park entrance fee and your luggage will be inspected. See Getting there for flight and arrival information.

In front of the arrival hall you will meet your naturalist guide and fellow passengers, and the airport shuttle will transfer you to the ferry across the Itabaca Channel. On Santa Cruz you continue by bus through the lush highlands to the harbour of Puerto Ayora. Our inflatable dinghies ('zodiacs') take you the last stretch to the yacht.

PM: Mosquera

Mosquera lies in the middle of the Itabaca Channel, between Baltra and North Seymour. Galapagos sea lions are real beach lovers. Mosquera offers beautiful white coral sand and doesn't complicate their landing as neighbouring Seymour and Baltra do with their steep rocky coastlines. These agile fishers just have to enter the Itabaca Channel, which is a natural trap for marine life, thanks to a submarine ridge between Baltra and Santa Cruz. But fishing the channel is not without risk; sometimes a school of killer whales (orcas, recognisable by their characterising dorsal fins) enters to hunt sea lions.

Day 2 – Wednesday

Genovesa is well worth last night's longer navigation. All impressions will be nearly too much for a single day!

Not only because of its historical English name (Tower) Genovesa has a royal touch. Follow in the footsteps of Prince Philip – Galapagos lover for many years and patron of the Charles Darwin Foundation – and visit this favourite birding spot. Besides the largest insular breeding colonies of red-footed and Nazca boobies, they also breed frigatebirds, and the air is teeming with flocks of storm petrels. Look for the remarkable short-eared owl that hunts on foot, which can be considered most peculiar adaptive behaviour!

Programme:

AM: After breakfast and a wet landing on the sheltered beach of Darwin Bay you will go for a guided walk (moderate level; about 3km/2mi) and refreshing snorkelling.

PM: Around lunchtime we will sail to nearby Prince Philip's Steps, close to the entrance of the broken caldera. There you can snorkel again, and take the guided walk through cliff-top seabird colonies (moderate level; about 3km/2mi).

Overnight navigation: After dinner we will lift the anchor and navigate about 8 hours south to South Plaza.

AM: Darwin Bay (Genovesa)

Genovesa's horseshoe-shaped wall is proof that we have anchored inside the partly collapsed and submerged caldera of a submarine volcano! The visitor's site, Darwin Bay, is located at the very rear. This compact site shows the extreme varied coastal ecosystems of the Galapagos in miniature. The trail starts from the coral sand beach and subsequently passes a zone with saltbushes and mangroves, then crosses tidal creeks and barren lava formations, dry shrub lands, and finally turns on the ridge of some cliffs.

In this extremely varied and peaceful ambience, every single species has occupied its own ecological niche (preferred habitat) without disturbing others. Whimbrels and wandering tattlers forage actively along the surf, next to resting Galapagos sea lions. Herons wait motionless at the tidal pools. Impressive frigatebirds (both great and magnificent species) and red-footed boobies nest in the mangroves, where you can also notice some vocalists such as yellow warblers, Darwin's finches and

Galapagos mockingbirds. What's unique is that two subpopulations of the same species of large cactus finch differ from singing.

Tropicbirds, Nazca boobies, storm petrels, endemic lava- and swallow-tailed gulls soar along the cliffs. If you have already seen marine iguanas elsewhere, the small Genovesa species might not look too impressive, but consider that these are virtually the only reptiles that succeeded to reach and survive on this remote, upstream island (and have become endemic to this island).

PM: Prince Phillip's Steps (Genovesa)

Before landing you will take a dinghy-ride along the eastern arm of the caldera. On approach, the 25m/80ft high walls become overwhelming, and will give you a better impression of the dimensions of this crater. Sometimes a Galapagos fur seal will be resting on one of the shaded ledges. Although there are also seabirds, the real spectacle will take place on top and on the outside of the rim, which provide better perching and nesting places.

You will therefore have to hike and overcome the steep stairs from the landing dock to a bush of palo santo shrubs on top. Tropical dry forest vegetation appears dead during most months of the year, but just drops its leaves to prevent drying out by evaporation. It's a threatened ecosystem. Red-footed boobies with different plumages gratefully use these scarce nesting-places; unlike their blue-footed relatives 'red feet' don't nest on the rocky ground.

At the seaside of the rim, the bushes open up and you can enjoy wide views, a strong sea breeze and the amazing flying skills of countless seabirds. Following the exposed rim you will first pass a colony of Nazca boobies and finally reach the extensive storm petrel nesting places, where you might be lucky enough to spot how the well-camouflaged short-eared owl hunts for them on foot!

Day 3 – Thursday

Heading towards the heart of the archipelago you will visit extraordinary Santa Fe and not to be missed South Plaza that belongs to the most popular and unforgettable sites. Below the bizarre giant prickly pear cacti you will encounter characteristic land iguanas. Although this 'Jurassic islet' is different to every other site in the National Park, at the same time it is so typically Galapagos with its sharp contrasts, amazing diversity and stunning concentration of wildlife.

Programme:

AM: After breakfast you will take an unforgettable guided walk on South Plaza (easy level; about 1,25 km/0.75 mi; avoidable depths on the cliff-edge).

Before lunch we will sail to Santa Fe (about 2 hrs southeast), possibly escorted by bottlenose dolphins.

PM: After lunch you will have time for a refreshing swim or excellent snorkelling in the crystal clear azure waters of Barrington Bay.

At the end of the afternoon we have a wet landing on the beach of Santa Fe and a guided nature walk. Your guide decides whether to follow the easy shorter circuit, or a strenuous longer hike inland (moderate level; about 3km/2mi).

Navigation: After a quiet sleep in the sheltered bay we will lift the anchor in the dead of the night and sail to Kicker Rock, just off the coast of San Cristobal (about 4hrs).

Additional options scuba-diving: Gordon Rocks (Expert/Advanced) or Santa Fe (All levels).

AM: South Plaza

The south of both Plaza islets is the best place to encounter endemic Galapagos land iguanas. Watch your step and don't stumble over one of them whilst distracted by the equally bizarre giant prickly pear cactus-trees! These iguanas are not only ugly as Darwin pronounced, but also very patient and photogenic models with strikingly saffron colours. Overpopulation and severe food competition have affected their smaller size. It is incredible to see how cactus spines don't harm them while chewing pads, flowers and fruits. Also look out for some unique hybrids between a male marine iguana and a female land iguana.

Arriving at the upper rim, you get to know the other, wild and windy face of South Plaza that provides a complete different habitat. About 20m/75ft downwards impressively droning waves splash against the foot of massive cliffs. Being talented rock climbers, sun basking marine iguanas have escaped the cool shadows of the wall. Clouds of petrels, storm petrels, shearwaters and brown noddies make spectacular flights and sometimes appear to walk on the waves. Take your binoculars and don't miss the red-billed tropicbird with its graceful long tail and spectacular mating fights. These cliffs are also a nesting place for the endemic swallow-tailed gull, the most beautiful gull in the world. Its neatly lined eyes are perfectly adapted for its exceptional nightly fishing habits.

PM: Barrington Bay (Santa Fe)

Practically every animal on Santa Fe is unique; endemic to the Galapagos, or even to this island alone and extremely vulnerable! This extraordinary island is a remnant of probably the most ancient volcano of the Galapagos, and gave evolution enough time and isolation to create its wonders.

Your experience starts before anchoring, when the contours of its bizarre giant prickly pear cactus (opuntia) forests become distinguishable. These largest cacti of the islands have extremely thick trunks indeed, and can grow over 10m/33ft tall! You will land right in the middle of a Galapagos sea lion colony on the beach. From their outlooks at the beach ridge surprisingly fearless Galapagos hawks are ready to snatch away a lava lizard; not worrying that even these are unique...

Almost every visitor of Santa Fe becomes eager to get a glimpse of the rare Barrington land iguana. But this pale endemic version is not as easy to spot as its modelling counterparts on South Plaza. This one is more of a quest to find (rather untypical to the Galapagos); other times it surprises you by waiting for you next to the trail. Whether you spot it, or not, you will keep going from one surprise to the next.

While snorkelling in the azure coloured Barrington Bay between tropical reef fish, maybe a curious Galapagos sea lion will be willing to play with you!

Day 4 – Friday

Sunrise on the natural sculpture of Kicker Rock can be unforgettable! During a dinghy-ride you will feel the early morning ocean breeze in your hair and spot many seabirds. Besides being one of the landmarks of the Galapagos, Kicker Rock is also one of the favourite diving and snorkelling spots of the archipelago. Later today you will have time to relax aboard or at the cosy waterfront of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the halfway point on this full planned cruise route.

Programme:

AM: Before breakfast a dinghy-ride and optional snorkelling are scheduled (a snack is available before). Next we will navigate in about 1hr to the harbour of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, where you can spend some free time.

B4 Route: On arrival it's time to say goodbye, leave the yacht and continue to the airport.

PM: After welcome, check-in, lunch, and the safety-drill the dinghies will bring you to the pier, from where you will visit the Interpretation Centre and the village.

Before dinner your guide will give a first daily briefing and the captain and his crew will present themselves and share a welcome toast.

Overnight navigation: Around midnight the anchor will be lifted for a navigation of about 4 hours to the south-eastern island of Española.

AM: Kicker Rock (San Cristobal)

Kicker Rock has become one of the photogenic landmarks of the Galapagos. Clearly visible from afar, nature has moulded a massive offshore block of rock with a pointy tower next to it. Reaching about 150m/500ft above sea level this compact rock without typical stratified layers of cemented ashes is thought to be the remnant of a former tuff cone, which has eroded completely away; a resistant lava mass that never left the crater pipe remains.

While sailing around and spotting blue-footed boobies and great frigatebirds you can observe this intriguing sculpture from changing angles. From the side it takes the form of a giant shoe, upside down with the tower as the high heel (hence its English name Kicker Rock). In longitudinal direction it rather resembles a sleeping lion (hence its Spanish name Leon Dormido). It is an experience to pass the narrow channel between the main body and the spine.

These steep walls rise out of the deep sea. Kicker Rock is one of the favourite locations amongst scuba divers and snorkellers in the south-eastern archipelago. Amid colourful tropical fish you might have thrilling encounters with octopuses, different species of shark (including scalloped hammerhead sharks!), Pacific green turtles, spotted eagle rays and even – when you are really lucky – with barracudas, manta rays and giant oceanic manta rays!

PM: Interpretation Centre (San Cristobal)

The Interpretation Centre just outside the provincial capital Puerto Baquerizo Moreno is a perfect introduction as well as an interesting complement to the field-explanations and briefings of your naturalist guide. Information panels (English/Spanish), pictures, maquettes and true to life dioramas

tell the background story of the islands in a different way, which helps you to get an overview and learn what makes the Galapagos so unique. The well-maintained botanical garden with native species from the arid zone (including the giant prickly pear and candelabra cacti) is worth your visit as well; and you will probably spot the Chatham mockingbird, endemic to this island, that put Darwin on track of his evolution theory.

The attractive exhibition is quite complete and explains a series of natural circumstances that create the Galapagos' unique environment: such as the volcanic genesis of the islands, their remoteness from the continent, its ocean currents, its special climate, the arrival of different species, and their establishment, among others. It also recounts historic discovery and attempts of colonisation; and shows a diorama with ancient mail barrels from Post Office Bay. Extensively it concludes how times have changed with current conservation and the many ways in which this is being achieved, as well as the environmental challenges that proceed.

Day 5 – Saturday

The next island, Española, is located in the far south-eastern corner of the archipelago and promises to be a highlight of your cruise. As one of its crown jewels, this birdwatcher's and photographer's dream offers all that you might expect from the Galapagos. Walk just a few metres past waved albatrosses, booby colonies, sunbathing marine iguanas and Galapagos sea lions and feel as though you're in an exciting nature documentary! Several endemic species give you the opportunity to become an eyewitness of evolution.

Programme:

AM: After a 'wet landing' (bare feet) on the wide sandy beach at Gardner Bay you can stroll along the sea lions colony (easy level), or enjoy a moment of reflection, relaxation, or rolling with sea lions in the surf. Next you can plunge into the alluring turquoise-coloured Gardner Bay for snorkelling.

PM: Back on board we will navigate for about an hour. After lunch you will make a 'dry landing' (with footwear) at Suarez Point. During a longer guided walk (moderate level; 4km/2.5 mi/about 2 hours) you will pass spectacular seabird colonies on top of the cliffs (some short scrambling passages; avoidable depths).

Overnight navigation: After dinner San Jose will navigate about 5 hrs westward to the neighbouring island of Floreana.

AM: Gardner Bay (Española)

Make your first 'dive' into the alluring turquoise-coloured Gardner Bay, and admire colourful reef fish, snorkel side by side with a Pacific green turtle, or find yourself in the middle of playful Galapagos sea lions.

The striking white coral sandy beach is an important breeding site for Pacific green turtles, but without doubt its main attraction is the Galapagos sea lion colony. Females stay year round in this nursery, suckling their pups up to the age of 3 years, although they start to learn how to fish after 5 months. During the breeding- and mating season the colony becomes even more populous. The strongest

bachelors and elder males return from their secluded bases and start again to conquer and defend their part of the 1300m/4250ft long beach. Pregnant females choose the best territory to give birth, and will mate with their landlord again within a month.

PM: Suarez Point (Española)

Huge ocean waves crash on the southern basaltic cliffs of Suarez Point, and form a spectacular blowhole, where a fountain of sea water sprays metres/feet high into the air (depending on the tide and how strong the sea breeze pushes the waves). Take a meditative break in silence at this emblematic viewpoint to convert this unforgettable moment into a lifetime experience.

Waved albatrosses soar for most of their lives far out at sea and just come to Española (March-December) to breed and nurture their huge chicks. This spectacular seabird is the only tropic albatross (critically endangered species). Besides some strayed individuals on Isla de La Plata (off the Ecuadorian coast) it only breeds on Española, where you can witness its synchronous courtship dances, which include bowing, whistling and even a stylised form of 'sword fighting' with their bills (especially in October)!

Suarez Point is also a massive breeding site for Nazca and blue-footed boobies, swallow-tailed gulls and red-billed tropicbirds. Blue-footed boobies don't bother to breed in the middle of the trail. Particularly during the food-abundant garúa-season (2nd half of the year) you can admire amusing courtship dances, mating, breeding, emerging from the eggs, nurturing or first flight-attempts.

Española marine iguanas become bright red with a turquoise-coloured crest and legs at the start of the breeding season (starting from Christmas). Hood lava lizards are the largest of the 7 endemic species in the islands, as well as endemic mockingbirds, which have turned to carnivorous behaviour!

Day 6 – Sunday

At about midnight San Jose will drop the anchor at the north cape of Floreana (Cormorant Point), where American flamingos use to forage and breed. Historical Post Office Bay and Baroness Lookout are located nearly at the end of the world. Galapagos sea lions will probably be waiting to play with you while snorkelling at Champion Islet. From the dinghy, bird watchers can amplify their growing spot lists with endemic Galapagos penguins (the only location in the south-eastern corner) and maybe even with the almost extinct Charles mockingbird.

Programme:

AM: After breakfast, a wet landing on the greeny beach of Cormorant Point and walk to a powdery coral sand beach on the other side of the peninsula (easy level; about 1,5km/1mi). En route you can observe the American flamingo lagoon from different viewpoints.

Back on-board we will navigate about 45 min to Champion Islet. There are fantastic snorkelling opportunities here; or if this is not your thing or if you prefer bird watching, you can take a dinghy-ride instead.

PM: While having lunch we will navigate back to Post Office Bay (about 1hr). Post your holiday greetings in the historical barrel, one of three nearby visitor's sites on Floreana's north coast (short

displacement, wet landing) and relax. Explore by inflatable dinghy – or in your own pace by sea-kayak – another submerged crater rim around the bay of Baroness Lookout.

Overnight navigation: After dinner San Jose will cross-over to Santiago (about 7 hours north).

Additional options scuba-diving: choice out of 9 nearby diving sites (All levels)

AM: Cormorant Point (Floreana)

The peninsula of Cormorant Point forms the extreme north cape of Floreana, which is pockmarked by a numbers of smaller volcanic cones and covered by tropical dry forest (predominantly palo santo). Please don't expect to spot the flightless cormorant at Cormorant Point. This emblematic example of evolution lives exclusively in the remote west of the Galapagos on Fernandina and Isabela (Route A). Instead, its salty lagoon is one of the best places on the Galapagos to observe a breeding colony of American flamingos. However, when breeding is done and the lagoon dries up, these exotic birds tend to be on the move to look for shrimps and algae from other saline lakes.

At the landing beach you will be welcomed by a small Galapagos sea lion-colony. The green sand contains a high percentage of glassy olivine crystals that have been blown out by the surrounding tuff cones. The 'flour sand' beach on the south side of the peninsula feels very smooth on your feet; this is pulverized by parrotfishes. Schools of sting rays in the surf love using this powdery sand to hide themselves, and Pacific green turtles come ashore to bury their eggs in it at night (first months of the year). Next morning you can notice their tracks from the dunes, or eventually still catch an exhausted, delayed one, crawling back to sea.

AM: Champion Islet (Floreana)

Bottlenose dolphins frequently escort our passage to Champion Islet and you can see them from nearby jumping the wakes! This is just the prelude of an unforgettable snorkelling excursion. Galapagos sea lions turn into playful acrobats underwater – without a doubt the number one attraction. There are also lots of reef fish, and perhaps a Pacific green turtle.

An inflatable dinghy ride along the shoreline of this islet offers sightings of lots of sea birds that are endemic to the archipelago, including Galapagos penguins (at its extreme eastern distribution border; in danger of extinction), blue-footed boobies, magnificent frigatebirds and red-billed tropicbirds. swallow-tailed gulls and lava herons.

Most desired on every serious birder's wish list is to get a glimpse of the Charles mockingbird on top of prickly pear cacti (take binoculars!). To the unschooled eye this unique variant may look hardly any different to their relatives on other islands, but it is almost extinct (less than 250 birds, depending on dry or wet years); so you need some luck to spot it from the beach. This mockingbird is a scientific and historic key species because it put Darwin on track of his theory of 'adaptive radiation'.

PM: Post Office Bay & Baroness Lookout (Floreana)

Bring your unstamped postcards and post them in the peculiar barrel on this historic site. Together with James Bay (Santiago) this used to be a popular base to complement stocks. The present barrel commemorates the improvised mail service between British 16th century whalers and poachers. Returning vessels also picked up letters for home delivery. Finally this post box became the termination of the flourishing British whaling industry in this region (Moby Dick), because it let the

American frigate USS Essex easily locate and hijack British whalers during the Anglo-American War (1812-1815).

The arm of a submerged tuff cone protects the turquoise bay at Baroness Lookout. Besides Galapagos sea lions, Pacific green turtles and golden cownose rays you might spot Galapagos penguins! This is the only place in the south-eastern archipelago where some penguins reside; the best chances however will be tomorrow on Bartolomé or in the remote west on Fernandina and Isabela (Route A).

Climb the miniature basaltic cone of Baroness Lookout and dream away at the paradisiacal coast-scape. This viewpoint was the favourite spot of one of Floreana's first colonists, the eccentric Baroness and self-proclaimed 'Empress of Galapagos' Eloisa von Wagner Bosquet, who even built her house a few metres behind. She and one of her lovers were the first in a series of mysterious disappearings and deaths in the 1930s.

Day 7 – Monday

After quite a long stretch northward, San Jose has anchored between two unique sites. Enjoy the famous, wild romantic panorama of Bartolomé and make a 'moonwalk' on the barren lava flow of Sullivan Bay. The forces that have created these islands will impress you forever. Surrounding coral reefs give a second chance to meet endangered Galapagos penguins, and whilst snorkelling you might even encounter these agile hunters fishing!

Programme:

AM: Another full day, largely dedicated to volcanism. After breakfast you will make an not yet too hot moonwalk across the solidified lava flow (guided walk, easy level; ca. 1,5km/1mi). You will be welcomed aboard with a juice before snorkelling.

PM: After 15 minutes of navigation to approach nearby Bartolomé you can enjoy your lunch buffet and prepare for fantastic shallow water snorkelling at the foot of Pinnacle Rock (alternative: walking around or relaxing on the beach).

As soon as the hottest hours have passed you will climb the stairs of Bartolomé's Summit Trail, which is rewarded with panoramic views (guided walk, moderate level; about 800m/0.5 mi; 114m/375ft altitude difference).

Navigation: After dinner we will sail to the north coast of Santa Cruz (about 2:30 hrs south).

Additional options scuba-diving: Bartolomé or Cousin Rocks (both advanced)

AM: Sullivan Bay (Santiago)

Setting foot at the lava stream covering Sullivan Bay is like landing on the moon. The desolate, stretched-out fields seem mostly lifeless, but there is enough to see on this highly popular site amongst photographers. Graphical bas-reliefs of rope-lava in the crust are unique to the Galapagos and Hawaii.

There is even some life! Pacific green turtles seasonally bury eggs in the tiny white sand beach, where you may also encounter crabs, a strayed blue heron or oystercatcher. On the lava flow only

sparse pioneer vegetation such as lava cacti and carpetweed can hold. You might encounter a lava lizard, locusts (!) or a small snake species (Galapagos racer) hunting for them.

The barely eroded lava flow seems to have been solidified for short, and suggests that you are just able to set foot on it. The baking sun completes the sensation of heat. The winding and rippled pahoehoe rope-lava has preserved intriguing traces that tell flaming stories about vaporised leatherleaf trees and miniature cones of volcanic glass.

Distinctive tuff cones pockmark the new-formed lunatic landscape. Their rusty, oxidised colours and vegetation reveal that these are from an older generation. Originally these were volcano islets on their own that have become part of Santiago during the latest eruption (1897), when the hot flood of ooze filled up large parts of the bay, which is the black crust you walk on. For the time being only the opposite islet of Bartolomé escaped from incorporation. Ecologically these cones can still be considered as islands, though no longer surrounded by sea, but by wide infertile lava fields.

PM: Bartolome

The wild romantic volcano islet of Bartolomé is among the youngest of the islands, and on a geological scale just recently born out of fire. Although tiny (only 120ha/300ac) and at first sight lifeless, Bartolomé offers some of the wildest landscapes and best panoramas in the entire archipelago. To enjoy the postcard view of the idyllic 'Pinnacle Bay' you have to climb the stairs to the viewpoint on top of the island (114m/375ft). Suddenly enter a dramatic world of threatening (though extinguished) nearby spatter cones, craters, and lightweight lava droplets that have been spewed out by fiery fountains. The Summit Trail is also ideal for witnessing how scanty pioneer vegetation such as lava cactus is struggling to take root in the bare virgin lava fields.

From the summit you suddenly face a second, paradisiacal world; Galapagos' landmark 'Pinnacle Rock' towers prominently over an isthmus with crescent sand beaches on each side, and dunes with evergreen mangrove bushes in-between.

Underwater, a third, completely distinctive world opens up to you, resembling a tropical aquarium. Its shallow, clear and warm waters are ideal for snorkelling between coral-grinding parrot fishes, shoals of surgeonfishes, harmless whitetip reef sharks and Pacific green turtles. If you are lucky you can even catch the sight of fishing Galapagos penguins.

Day 8 – Tuesday

Even at the very end of your cruise the Galapagos Islands keep surprising. On this last morning you will explore the evergreen mangle forest of Black Turtle Cove, and feel a while as if you are in the Amazon rainforest instead of at the north coast of Santa Cruz. These lagoons and adventurous creeks teem with marine and birdlife, and (seasonally) with mating turtles and sharks.

Programme:

AM: Shortly after your wake-up call and a snack you will leave for this farewell dinghy-ride. After breakfast it's time to say goodbye, leave the yacht and continue to the airport (unless you have booked an extension on the A-route).

AM: Black Turtle Cove (Santa Cruz)

The ancient mangle at Black Turtle Cove has grown out to forest proportions and forms the backdrop for a distinct adventure. You might even feel for a while as if you're in the Amazon rainforest instead of close to sea; though on a closer look vegetation mainly exists of red mangroves with characteristic aerial roots that let them survive in salty and brackish water. By inflatable dinghy we will explore the calm emerald lagoon and enter the surrounding shallow creeks of these salt-water marshes. The outboard engine is sometimes turned off, so that you can enjoy the ambience at its fullest. You have to keep your eyes peeled when looking around and staring into the crystal clear waters to observe all the life that is flying and swimming around.

You can spot silently hunting lava herons on the banks and brown pelicans nesting on top of the mangroves. Various species of ray and shark come to this nutritious cradle to give birth; scalped hammerhead sharks come back to the place where they're born and their babies tend to be close to the surface. Pacific green turtles (black turtles was their former name) visit this cove in their reproduction season (November-January); if you're lucky you can catch them mating on the surface! Afterwards their eggs are deposited on coral sand beaches along this north-western coastline of Santa Cruz.

AM: Transfer to Baltra airport

Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crew members the dinghy will bring you and your luggage to Baltra, where we take the airport shuttle. Your guide will accompany you to the check-in counters in the departure hall.

We expect you to return home with stunning pictures and unforgettable memories for life!